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Department of State Foreign Service Tour Policy

The Department of State defines a tour as the total period of time that an employee is assigned to an overseas post, regardless of any "breaks" for home leave, rest and recuperation, consultation, etc. The Agency definition as used in this study includes only that continuous period of time from the date of PCS arrival of an employee abroad until such time as he departs the assignment whether for home leave, return to that or some other station abroad, domestic reassignment, retirement, termination, or other reasons, minus any personal leave taken in the United States.

The Department of State's overseas tour policy is a flexible one tailored to fit individual circumstances at each post as well as considering the rank, position, and career development needs of each employee (Tab G). Categories of employees include: junior officers (FSO 8 - 6); mid-career officers (FSO 5 - 3); senior officers (FSO 2 - 1); and support staff personnel of FSS classes 10 - 7 and all secretarial and communications personnel. Junior officers will not serve more than two years at any one post. To the extent feasible, such officers will serve at three separate posts during their first six years of service, including an assignment in the United States. Support staff employees normally will be transferred when they take home leave, but may be returned to the post if serving at a non-differential post. The senior and middle grade officers will normally serve at a post for a significantly longer period of time, i.e., tours at non-differential posts range in length from three to six years. For example, the practice in Europe has been to send these officers out for five years with a home leave break at the end of either the second or third year.

In 1965 the average actual tour served overseas by Department of State senior and mid-career officers was 34.3 months. Although there are no statistical data available on the average actual tour served by Department of State junior officers and support staff personnel, it is assumed that their average actual tour would be considerably less than 24 months, since none of them are permitted tours greater than 24 months and many tours are set at 18 months. Using the Department of State's tour definition, Agency senior and middle grade officers who completed overseas assignment during 1965 had served an average tour of 35.2 months and all lower-grade personnel served an average of 27.4 months. These average tour-at-post periods would doubtless be considerably greater if the Agency adopted a longer tour of duty.

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Excerpt from: Department of State Foreign Affairs Manual, Volume 3 -  
Personnel

"143.1-7 Normal Tours of Duty

A tour of duty will normally fall into one of the following categories:

- a. 5 years broken by home leave at the end of 3 years;
- b. 4 years broken by home leave at the end of 2 years;
- c. 3 years followed by home leave and transfer;
- d. 3 years broken by home leave after 18 months;
- e. 3 years broken by one or two rest and recuperation trips;
- f. 2 years followed by home leave and transfer;
- g. 2 years broken by one rest and recuperation trip; or
- h. 18 months followed by home leave. An assignment to a post in the United States will normally be for 4 years except for officers in classes 7 and 8, who will normally serve for 2 years."

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Department of State

Designated Length of Tours at Overseas Posts

The Department of State has a flexible tour policy which it applies to each specific overseas post. The policy differentiates between (1) senior and mid-career officers, (2) junior officers and support staff employees, and (3) between the various posts throughout the world. The tours of duty range from 18 months; 18 months, home leave and return for another 18 months; 2 years; 2 years or 3 years; 2 years, home leave, and return for another 2-year or 3-year tour; 3 years; and 3 years, home leave, and return for another 2-year tour. At certain designated posts, generally differential posts, rest and recuperation leave is authorized one to three times for tours from two to five years in length.

The following summarization shows, by area of the world, the number of posts with varying lengths of tour:

Area	Designated Length of Tour							
	18 mos	18 + 18 mos	2 yrs	2/3 yrs	2 + 2 yrs	2 + 3 yrs	3 yrs	3 + 2 yrs
Africa (61 posts)								
Senior/Mid-Career Officers			47	32			33	
Junior Officers			61					
Europe (66 posts)								
Senior/Mid-Career Officers	10		5	5	59		64	57
Junior Officers			63					
Far East (36 posts)								
Senior/Mid-Career Officers	2	10	4		20		22	20
Junior Officers	6		30					
Near East (39 posts)								
Senior/Mid-Career Officers								
Junior Officers	19	23	21	14		20		3
Junior Officers		2	22					
Western Hemisphere (74 posts)								
Senior/Mid-Career Officers	26	14	15	49		50		47
Junior Officers			53					

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